RANDOM RECORDS OF A LIFETIME

VOLUME 12
SUPPLEMENT

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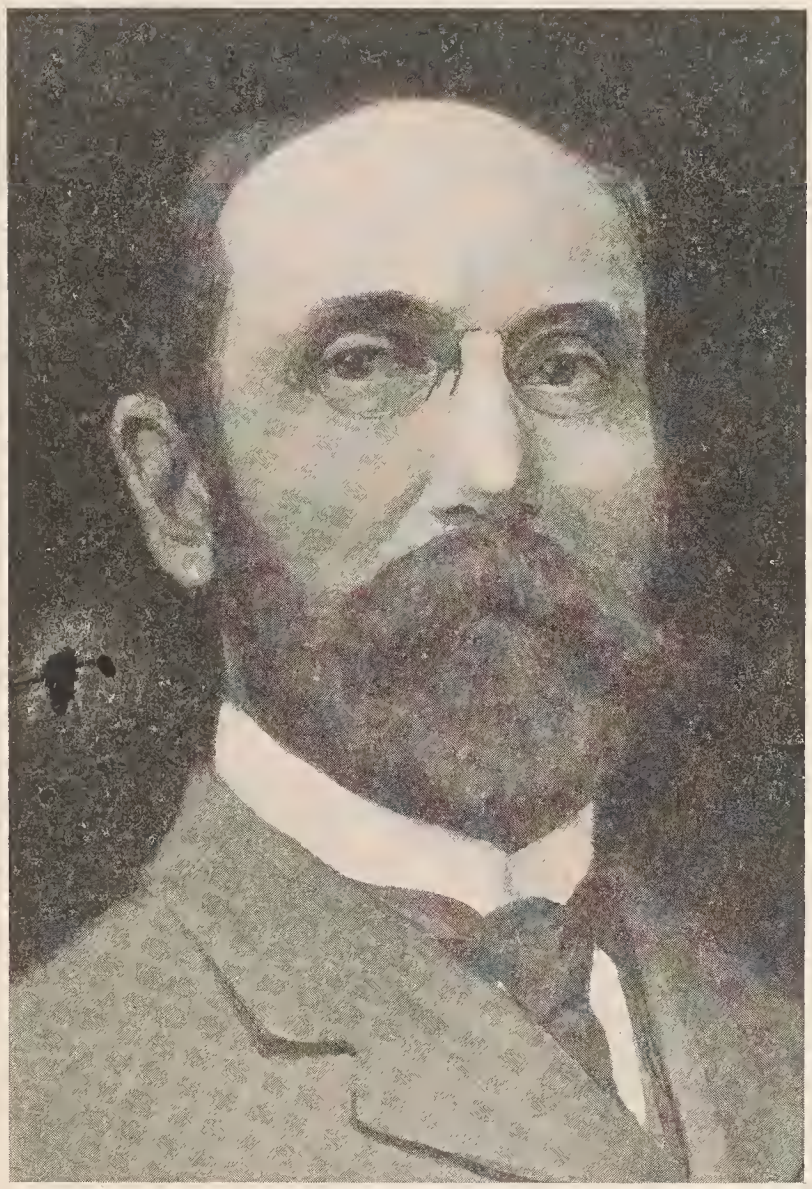

CHARLES L. FREER, OF DETROIT, MICH., WHO IS GIVING HIS ART TREASURES TO THE GOVERNMENT

THE FREER GALLERY

Personnel, 1923

Mr. John E. Lodge, Curator
Mr. Carl W. Bishop, Associate Curator
Miss Katharine N. Rhoades, Associate
Miss Grace D. Guest, Assistant Curator
Mrs. Ruth L. Walker, Stenographer.

Gallery opened by card May 3, 1923, and to the public on May 10, 1923.

CHARLES LANG FREER

Capitalist, born in Kingston, New York, 1856, the son of Jacob R. and Phoebe Jane (Townsend) Freer. Educated in the public schools, Ulster County, New York. Hon. A.M., University of Michigan. Unmarried. Was engaged in railroad service and manufacturing in Detroit. Retired. Connoisseur of art. Presented his art collection to Smithsonian Institution, Washington; also presented $1,000,000 for building for same. Clubs: Groiler, Players (New York), Caxton (Chicago, Copley Society (Boston) Yondotega, Witenagemote, Detroit, University, Lake St. Clair Fishing and Shooting (Detroit). Died September 25, 1919.

(6)

Copy

THE WHITE HOUSE

Washington

December 4, 1905.

My dear Dr. Adler:

The President would be glad if you could find it convenient to come to see him this evening at nine o'clock, at the White House.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) Wm. Loeb, Jr.

Secretary to the President.

Dr. Cyrus Adler,

National Museum.

(7)

Copy.

CONFIDENTIAL memorandum of a conference held at the White House, dictated by Dr. Adler, December 6, 1905.

In response to the accompanying note I went to the White House at nine o'clock on the evening of December 4th. I had learned in the afternoon that the purpose of the conference was to discuss the Freer Collection, and Senator Henderson had requested me to bring along whatever papers were important in the matter.

There were present:

The President, Roosevelt

Senator Henderson,

Mr. Hitt,

Mr. Justice Holmes of the Supreme Court,

Mr. W. H. Holmes, of the Bureau of Ethnology,

Mr. A. J. Parsons, of the Library of Congress, and

Mr. Fischer, the art dealer.

The conference lasted over an hour-and-a-half.

The President stated that he knew Mr. Freer, had been at his house, had seen his pictures, and thought highly of them. He had heard all kinds of contradictory statements about the terms of the proposed gift and about the proposed action of the Smithsonian Institution, and he regarded the

coming of this collection to Washington as of such importance that he wishes to inform himself.

Senator Henderson explained the conditions somewhat and mentioned his great interest in art subjects and the fact that as far back as fifty-five years ago he had advocated before Congress the establishment of a National Gallery of Art.

The President then asked for the specific terms and in accordance with his request, I read the original letter from Mr. Freer and the second letter in response to the Secretary's letter requesting Mr. Freer to modify his conditions. The President, Justice Holmes and Mr. Fischer kept up a running comment during the reading, the President stating that this made him think the collection even more valuable than he had supposed. Mr. Fischer said of the Kakemonos, a single pair sometimes cost as much as $25,000.

After these papers had been read, Senator Henderson asked me to read the report of the Committee of the Regents which visited Detroit. When I came to the passage relating to the impressionist school, the President dissented and said that Whistler was not an impressionist and he did not think the other artists were; and Mr. Fischer, the art dealer, declared that Whistler was not an impressionist but was a positivist. Senator Henderson, however, stuck to his view.

The President also criticized the expression about the ideals of Greece and Rome in the report, declaring that we had no pictures to speak of from Greece and Rome.

When the report came to the legal part, the President said that he thought this unjustified; that Mr. Freer was an honorable man and meant to do what he said he would do; that he would take his word in lieu of the formal legal statement; just as he would take Senator Henderson's word; that he knew Mr. Freer to be a man of honorable purpose. Mr. Justice Holmes concurred in this view, but admitted, in reply to an inquiry from Senator Henderson, that the letter was not in legal form. He stated, however, that If Mr. Freer would simply add to the letter "I covenant to make" such a bequest, and add his seal to his signature and have his signature witnessed, this would make a binding contract.

After the reading of the report was finished, the President was emphatic in his statement that the gift ought to be accepted, with conditions or without them. Senator Henderson pointed out that the Smithsonian did not have sufficient funds to maintain the building, and therefore, could not promise to do it.

The President said that the promise of the Smithsonian now would be as good as the promise of Mr. Freer; both would be in the future.

Senator Henderson continued to debate the matter, and the President finally inquired whether Mr. Freer had presented the alternative of giving it to the Government and I said that he had.

The President then turned to Mr. Hitt and asked whether the Government could accept the gift direct, without legislation. Mr. Hitt said that he thought not, unless it were a gift to the Smithsonian or National Museum. He explained to the President the great difficulty in securing such legislation as would be required, although he offered to try to secure it if the President wished it.

Senator Henderson expressly disclaimed speaking for the Institution, saying that he was only giving his own view, but the President seemed to take it for granted that the Institution would not act favorably.

The President said finally that he thought that Mr. Freer had made a generous offer, which had not been generously met, and that he proposed to make him feel good; he would invite him to the White House to dine and to stay over night.

Senator Henderson, rising to his feet, said: "Mr. President, you, who have settled coal strikes and moved kings and emperors about on the chess board will, I hope, succeed in changing some of the details of Mr. Freer's proposition."

The President thought that the best way to obviate the whole difficulty would be to suggest to Mr. Freer that he put less money into the building, and put aside a sum for the maintenance of the collection.

The discussion between the President and Senator Henderson was most spirited but always in the best of part.-------x.

Page 5 missing

Dear Mr Dorsey

Can you have some one make me a copy of the last page (5) to give completeness to my Freer volume of Random notes? & greatly oblige,

Yours Truly

W. H. Holmes

In Detroit Mr. Freer has magnificent offices in the Union Trust Building, where he personally attends to the affairs of his own estate when not devoting his time to art. A more entertaining conversationalist could not be found than he. He is a man who appears ten years younger than he really is.

5

Get page 5 from
Dr Adlers Memorandum

My own report states that Mrs Roswell Clinched the acceptance by bringing his big fist down on the arm of his chair with a bang as he speculated "Gentlemen accept this collection whether you can take care of it or not"

HWD

Dear Mr Holmes —
I have had the original of Dr Adler's memorandum looked up and there is no page 5. It ends at p. 4.
HWD.

(12)

Copy.

Dear Mr. Ravenel:

This morning I had a long talk with Mr. Freer and found him apparently in a more serious condition than in May. He was very much worried on account of the outcome of the proposition made to Mr. Lodge, but considered it a closed incident. He was also greatly troubled by what he considered the neglect by authorities of the Smithsonian of the interests of the Freer Collection. He had a clipping from the Washington Times of June 6th headed "National Art Gallery," in which it is stated that Mr. Freer expects to add to his collection a representation of the work of Whistler. This troubled him greatly as he considered that we should have detected the misleading statement and corrected it promptly by a statement that the Freer collection actually contains the largest and finest series of etchings and paintings by Whistler that there is in any one collection in the world, also the celebrated "Peacock Room."

I do not recall having seen the article, or its having been called to my attention. Will you not at once make such arrangements that any statements or matter pretaining to the Freer Gallery shall be promptly called to your attention, so that they may be scrutinized by both Mr. Holmes and myself.

Will you not have a note prepared along the lines of the enclosed draft and signed with my name, sent to the Washington Times for publication. When published send a copy to Mr. Freer at the Hotel Gotham, New York, with a letter of transmittal

signed by Mr. Holmes stating that it was with sincere regret that a statement should appear referring to the Freer Gallery which did not contain an appropriate paragraph in relation to the splendid Whistler material, and asking him in the event of any similar statements occurring that come to his attention we would be very grateful to him if he would send them on promptly to the Institution. Meantine every effort will be made to scrutinize any articles that can be obtained by the Smithsonian.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ C. D. Walcott.

Mr. W. de C. Ravenel,
Administrative Assistant,
U. S. National Museum.

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT AND THE FREER COLLECTION

I happened to come across in "Confessions in Art," by Harrison S. Morris, an account of the acceptance of the Freer Collection by the Regents of the Institution. Mr. Morris confirms my impression of the President's part in deciding the question of acceptance. Mr. Morris' account, it seems, was reported to him by Mr. Fischer.

"But to resume, Mr. Fischer's experiences with President Roosevelt were many and memorable, but to me the most interesting was the part he took in the conferences over the acceptance of the Freer Collection.

"I had known Mr. Freer, as all of us did in his day, and my intercourse with him was rather pleasant. He lent us a group of Whistler's paintings for one of the annual shows of the Academy; and he followed this up by paying me a visit. He was nice enough until he went upstairs to the gallery and saw his pictures, small and not important, hung in a group beside one of the entrances in the main gallery. Then he showed particular pique and broke out in quite unnecessary blague. I told him the canvases had been hung by Whistler's devoted friend, J. Alden Weir, and that they thus occupied a place of honor. He would

not be consoled. Then he stiffly held out his hand, and said, 'Well, good-by, Mr. Morris,' in a pretty offensive manner. I did not take his hand, and we parted with a bow.

"Mr. Freer had offered his matchless collection of pictures, mainly by Whistler, with some oriental sculpture, to the United States Government, with a costly building to be erected for their installation in Washington. Of course, this was a princely gift to be accepted and acknowledged without a moment's reflection. But, according to Mr. Fischer, the Smithsonian Institution, to which the subject was referred, saw fit to reject the offer. It was then that Mr. Fischer, so he said, got busy and went to see Mr. Roosevelt, the President. There was an immediate explosion in the vicinity of the White House. In consequence of this, the Regents of the Smithsonian were summoned to the White House on a certain evening by their ex-officio officer, the President.

"They were forcibly told that they should organize then and there into a meeting of the Board, and that the President as one of them would take his official part; and as Mr. Fischer, who was present, repeated it, they were expected to vote to accept the gift of Mr. Freer.

C

"They naturally did. And the present galleries on the Smithsonian grounds, holding an incalculable treasury of our art for all of us to enjoy, for our education in taste and beauty, and for the enrichment of our history, is the brilliant consequence."

I was present
W.M.H.

(pages 232-233)

Fredge

(15)

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
FREER GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D. C.

March 25th, 1929.

My dear Dr. Holmes:-

In reply to your note of the 20th, let me say that you are, of course, entirely welcome to photographs of any thing, or things, in the Freer collection that you like best, and I am sending herewith for your examination our albums of sample photographs, so that you may know what is at your disposal. If, however, you should have in mind any object not represented in the albums, I shall be glad to have photographs of that object made for you.

Yours very truly,

J. E. Lodge

J. E. Lodge,
Curator.

Dr. William H. Holmes,
Director of the National Gallery of Art.

JOHN ELLERTON LODGE

CURATOR, FREER GALLERY OF ART

Born Nahant, Massachusetts, August 1, 1878, son of Henry Cabot and Anna Cabot Mills Lodge. Was educated at Harvard 1896-98 and abroad. Curator Department Asiatic Art, Boston Museum Fine Arts, since 1910, and Curator of the Freer Gallery of Art and Chairman on Oriental Art, National Gallery of Art Commission, since 1920. Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, American Oriental Society and others.